

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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HOUSE GOP LEAVES AVIATION SECURITY LOOPHOLE WIDE OPEN

Washington, DC: Under pressure from the White House and Republican leaders, the House of Representatives today defeated, by a vote of 198 to 226, a provision in the Homeland Security Appropriations bill that would have required all cargo loaded aboard passenger planes to be physically screened by October 31, 2004. According to the General Accounting Office, approximately 22 percent of air cargo transported in the United States is carried aboard passenger planes. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, had successfully attached the cargo screening amendment to the House version of the Homeland Security Appropriations bill, by a vote of 278-146, and also had succeeded in passing, by a vote of 347-47, a motion to instruct House conferees to include the cargo screening provision in the final version of the Homeland Security Appropriations bill. Despite these winning margins, the cargo screening provision was dropped during the conference to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the Homeland Security spending bill.

"Today the Republican majority in Congress refused to close a gaping loophole in our airline security plan. Instead of requiring cargo to be physically screened before it's loaded on passenger planes, the GOP settled for spending more money on the flawed Known Shipper Program. Republicans said screening cargo it is too expensive. But if we can find \$856 million on upgrading and repairing airports in Iraq, why can't we spend money to screen cargo here at home, where it's needed to protect airline passengers in the U.S.?"

"They say we have the "Known Shipper" program and don't need physical screening. But the young man who shipped himself undetected from New York to Texas used one of these Known Shippers.

"They say we don't have the technology. But companies tell me all the time that they have the equipment to do the job. In fact, a representative from Boeing testified before the Homeland Security Committee in July that companies can provide the technology needed. Boeing should know – they installed more than 6,000 explosive detection systems and explosive trace devices at 439 commercial airports in the United States to meet a screening deadline that Congress established for passenger baggage. Boeing did it in less than 6 months.

"They say it will bring commerce to a screeching halt. But what would be the cost to commerce if a bomb exploded in the cargo hold of a passenger aircraft?"

"When it comes to cargo security, screening is believing. Just checking paperwork won't provide passengers the protection they need. We need a layered approach for cargo that is similar to the approach we use for passengers. While some passengers are subjected to secondary screening or have their baggage opened and searched, EVERYONE goes through that first metal detector and puts their bags through the screening machine. We need to ensure that packages that go on passenger planes go through physical screening, just like passengers do."

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